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BROWNBACK CHAIRS HEARING ON IRAN, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, today chaired a hearing on Iran and U.S. policy towards Iran.

"We had originally planned on examining the progress President Khatami has made in moving Iran towards democracy and rule of law but in the meantime, the Iranian students have answered this question and have sent a very clear signal that progress has been disappointing," Brownback said. "And yesterday, commanders of the Revolutionary Guards reportedly warned President Khatami that they are running out of patience with his moves toward political and social reform and blamed him for encouraging the sentiments that exploded in last week's pro-democracy demonstrations. The short term outlook for more democracy in Iran appears bleak at the moment.

"The recent uprisings were the results of oppressive internal policies and dashed hopes for more freedom which President Khatami had promised. The administration's decision to remain silent and avoid this issue can only achieve the very opposite of its weak intent. I cannot think of a policy that is more likely to cause the Iranian public to believe that the U.S. is a guilty partner in the recent uprisings. Rather than silence, the Iranian students need a reaffirmation of the principles that this nation believes in: democracy, rule of law, and freedom of expression for all. The United States should not be hesitant to speak up for the principle of freedom of expression. It is very disappointing that this administration could even hesitate on such an important matter.

"In fact, if one looks at the rhetoric of the hardliners in Iran, there is very little that the United States is not accused of, and repeatedly -- even absent statements by the administration. Hiding our head in the sand and pretending that if we lay low it will not happen is not keeping faith with those very ideals for which this nation stands. Also, even if one accepts the administration's argument -- which I don't -- why are they suddenly worried about coming forward to speak about Iran's foreign policy stance and U.S. policy in response to that?

"The fact is, that there is little change in Iran's foreign policy and it is clear that Khatami's 'moderate' agenda does not extend beyond Iran. Under Khatami, Iran has continued its arms deliveries to radical groups around the world, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon; Iran continues to seek to undermine the Middle East peace process; innocent Jews are arrested and charged with spurious accusations of espionage; and Iran has accelerated its missile program and will in a few short years at the latest, have an ICBM capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Despite Mr. Khatami's much-publicized message to the West calling for a dialogue between our two peoples, one cannot help but note that the Iranian government allows only a very small select group of Americans to visit Iran.

"What with Khatami's disappointing message to the students that 'deviations will be repressed with force and determination' and the ongoing arrests and threats of execution on charges of which these students are clearly innocent, it appears that the so-called moderation of Iranian policy is but wishful thinking on the part of the West," Brownback said.